

**The Laramie Project Presented in Troy Theater Feb. 25 - 28**

*Presented by special arrangement with Dramatist Play Service, Inc. 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY.*

WHEELING, WV, Feb. 12, 2010 — The Laramie Project, a controversial play by New York playwright Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project will be staged at Wheeling Jesuit University Feb. 25 – 28. The play examines community reaction to the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming gay student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyo.

Curtain is at 8 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Feb. 25, 26, 27 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28 at Troy Theater. Please note that the play contains adult situations and strong language that some might find offensive.

Considered by many a hate crime motivated by homophobia, the murder and its reaction by the town's residents provides a grim theme to this three-act play. Eight actors and one narrator portray more than 60 characters in a series of short scenes.

Wheeling Jesuit students **Natalie Bays, Lacie Cole, Si Gammache, John Kolks, Chris McPherson, Audra Macri, Ashley Onufrak, Tim Yelenic and Shane Young** play the roles. Stage managers are **Sarah Creamer and Emily Cuichta**. The play is directed by Dave Henderson, Wheeling Jesuit's coordinator of Performing Arts. *(From left are Audra Macri, Natalie Bays, Shane Young, Lacie Cole and Tim Yelenic.)*



According to the [Matthew Shepard Foundation Web site](#), "the story of Matthew Shepard began on Dec. 1, 1976 when he was born to Judy and Dennis Shepard in Casper, Wyo. He went to public school in Casper until his junior year of high school when he moved with his family to Saudi Arabia. He then finished high school education at The American School in Switzerland because there were no American high schools in Saudi Arabia at the time. In both high schools, he was elected to be a peer counselor. He was easy to talk to, made friends easily and fought for the acceptance of all people. His college career took him back to Wyoming where he studied political science, foreign relations and languages at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

The horrific events that took place shortly after midnight on Oct. 7, 1998 went against everything that Shepard embodied. Two men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, lead him to a remote area east of Laramie. He was tied to a split-rail fence where the two men severely assaulted him. He was beaten and left to die in the cold of the night. Almost 18 hours later, he was found by a bicyclist who initially mistook him for a scarecrow. He died on Oct. 12 at Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Col. with his family by his side.

His memorial service was attended by friends and family from around the world and garnered immense media attention that brought his story to the forefront of the fight against bigotry and hate.

The life and death of Matthew Shepard changed the way we talk about, and deal with, hate in America. Since his death, his legacy has challenged and inspired millions of individuals to erase hate in all its forms. His legacy lives on in the fight to replace hate with understanding, compassion and acceptance."

Through the relentless efforts of Judy Shepard, Mathew's mother, and many others The Matthew Shepard Act, officially The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, was passed this past Oct. 22 and was signed into law by President Barack Obama on Oct. 28, 2009. This measure expands the current federal-hate crime law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. *(WJU actors Ashley Onufrak and John Kolks.)*

The Laramie Project is presented free of charge, due to WJU's Season's On Us promotion where all plays offer complimentary admission to the public during the 2009 – 2010 season. The box office opens 30 minutes before curtain and tickets are distributed on a first come, first serve basis. No reservations will be taken. Parking is free in campus lots.



Contact Dave Henderson for more information, special accommodations, or questions regarding special performances for groups or organizations, [daveh@wju.edu](mailto:daveh@wju.edu), or call 304-243-2095.